DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 207 250 EA 014 118

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TITLE An NIE Program and its Policy Context. Linking R&D with Schools.
INSTITUTION Abt Associates, Inc., Cambridge, Mass.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, D.C. Dissemination and Improvement of Practice Program.
REPORT NO AAI-78-75
PUB DATE Sep 78
CONTRACT NIE-R-77-0015
NOTE 25p.; For related documents, see ED 188 314, ED 192 437, ED 196 134, EA 014 119-131 and EA 014 167.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Improvement; *Educational Innovation; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Methods; Linking Agents; Problem Solving; *Program Evaluation; Research Utilization
IDENTIFIERS Knowledge Utilization; *Research and Development Utilization Program

ABSTRACT

To give an overview of the National Institute of Education's Research and Development Utilization (RDU) program, this report summarizes the program's goals, structure, and evaluation study and discusses the educational policy issues the program seeks to answer. Designed to enhance local school improvement efforts in the areas of basic skills and career education, the RDU program attempts to help schools learn to use existing, validated products of educational research and development (R&D). The program's seven separate projects each stress improving schools' problem-solving and knowledge utilization through direct cooperation with schools, using linking agents and resource agencies, and encouraging local decision-making. The RDU evaluation study employs site visits, interviews, surveys, and case studies to analyze the schools, linking agents, and projects involved and to address seven major policy issues. To ensure that the study is oriented toward user needs, researchers asked 25 educational policy makers to examine the program and rank the policy issues. The policy makers endorsed the program and ranked highest the issues of R&D product impact after implementation, RDU program efficiency, and linking agent usefulness. An appendix briefly describes the seven RDU projects. (RW)

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Linking R&D with Schools

An NIE Program and its Policy Context

ED207250
EA 014 116

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

Prepared for:

National Institute of Education
Program on Dissemination and Improvement of Practice
Washington, D.C. 20208

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September, 1978

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The work upon which this report is based was performed pursuant to Contract No. NIE-R-77-0015 with the National Institute of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Foreword

The Research and Development Utilization (RDU) program was established in June, 1976, as an action research project of the National Institute of Education (NIE). The program helps schools to clarify and solve local problems in the areas of basic skills and career education through the use of innovative R&D products. A major NIE purpose in conducting the program is to learn more about the management of the local school improvement process and the role that externally developed R&D products can play in making it more effective. To this end, in November, 1977, Abt Associates was contracted to conduct a study of the RDU program.

This preliminary description of the RDU program and its policy context is intended to provide the study's major audiences and participants with an overview of the program, the projects it sponsors, the research design of the Abt Associates study, and finally the relevance of the study to current educational policy decisions at the federal and state levels. It is hoped that this description will serve two purposes. First, we believe evaluation research is most useful if it is influenced by the information needs of its major consumers. We hope this booklet will encourage an ongoing dialogue between ourselves and our major audiences: managers of educational change programs (including school-based practitioners), researchers, and policy makers. The section of this booklet on the policy context of the research is, in fact, based on interviews we have conducted already with a selected group of educational policy makers at the federal and state levels. Second, we hope this document will provide RDU program participants (including school-level personnel) with a useful orientation to the study in which they themselves will be asked to participate.

Many individuals within the National Institute of Education, the seven RDU projects, and the over 240 schools and school districts under study are helping us achieve our goals. Mary Ann Millsap and John Egermeier have served as federal project officers for our study. Senta Raizen, Larry Hutchins, and Ward Mason have had major supervisory responsibility for the program and its evaluation. Thomas Israel is the federal RDU Program Manager. Each of these individuals has played a major role in formulating the objectives of the research. The staffs of the seven RDU programs and the teachers and administrators of the schools and school districts engaged in the program have given generously of their time and experience in support of this research.

Within Abt Associates, Kent Chabotar, Diane Kell, James Molitor, Sheila Rosenblum, Gregory Spencer, and Joseph Zelan have held senior

responsibilities for the design and implementation of the research. Margie Schwartz has been responsible for the numerous office management tasks of the project since it began. Peter Desmond has edited this booklet, and Joyce Rooklin and Linda Clement are responsible for its design.

Finally we sincerely appreciate the contributions of the policy makers who offered their thoughts on our work.

Karen Seashore Louis
Principal Investigator

Michael B. Kane
Project Director

Cambridge, Massachusetts
September, 1978

The RDU Program

A number of federally stimulated efforts in the field of education have been oriented to finding solutions to local school problems. As a result, many local schools, universities, and research organizations have developed innovative curricula, training methods, or classroom materials. Unfortunately, these and other products of educational R&D have often failed to spread far beyond the places where they were initially developed. In education, as in other fields, it seems that a gap has opened between knowledge producers and the potential consumers of that knowledge, between researchers and practitioners. The result is that many schools across the country are struggling with the same problems. Some try to solve them using local ingenuity -- and, in the process, invent the wheel many times over. A few pick up on solutions that have been tried elsewhere but have not necessarily been proven effective. Many resign themselves to the status quo.

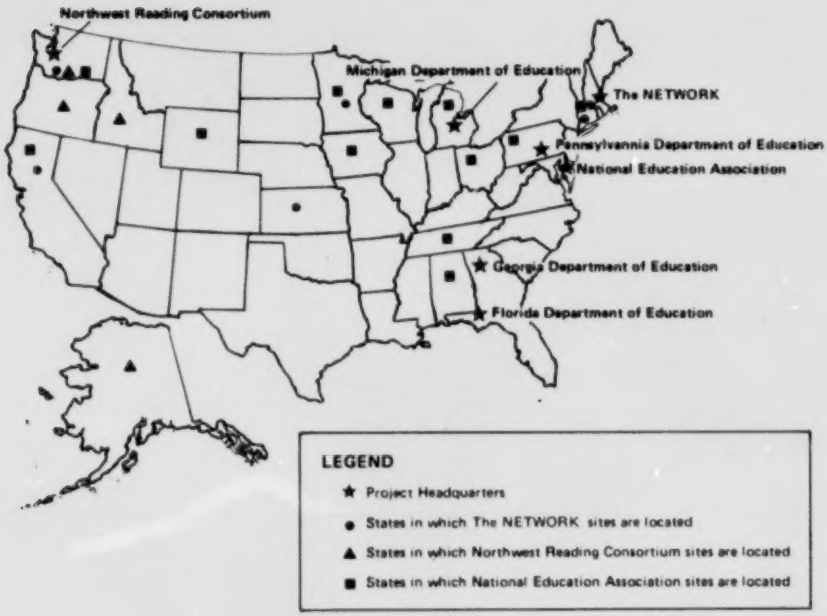
In recent years, however, both federal and state governments have begun sponsoring dissemination efforts to close the gap between the producers and consumers of new educational products and knowledge. One such effort is unusual in its emphasis on a research-based, rational approach to local school improvement through the use of existing, validated R&D products. This is the Research and Development Utilization (RDU) program, established by the National Institute of Education (NIE) in 1976. Regarded as an "action-research" endeavor, this program has been designed to achieve three major objectives:

- to help schools alleviate specific, locally defined problems in the areas of basic skills and career education;
- to help school and community personnel learn about the products of educational R&D; and
- to increase understanding of how the local program improvement process can be better managed and become more effective.

As depicted in Figure 1, the RDU program sponsors seven projects: four under the direction of state education agencies (in Pennsylvania, Georgia, Florida and Michigan) and three managed by multistate consortia (the National Education Association, based in Washington, D.C.; The NETWORK Consortium, based in Andover, Massachusetts; and the Northwest Reading Consortium, based in the state education agency in Olympia, Washington). Overall coordination of the RDU program is the responsibility of NIE's Program on Dissemination and Improvement of Practice.

Figure 1

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF R & D UTILIZATION PROGRAM PROJECTS AND SITES


Northwest Reading Consortium
Michigan Department of Education
The NETWORK
Pennsylvania Department of Education
National Education Association
Georgia Department of Education
Florida Department of Education
LEGEND
Project Headquarters
States in which The NETWORK sites are located
States in which Northwest Reading Consortium sites are located
States in which National Education Association sites are located

The RDU Projects

The seven RDU projects share certain programmatic characteristics. First, they have the common goal of improving problem solving and knowledge utilization in local schools. Since "problem solving" and "knowledge utilization" are central concepts in the RDU program, it is useful to distinguish between them:

- Problem solving has to do with the school's efforts to identify basic organizational and instructional dilemmas and then to choose and implement the best ways to resolve them. The range of problems facing any school is enormous, from poor staff morale to lack of adequate curriculum materials. The RDU program addresses a subset of these problems: those dealing with basic skills or career education.

- Knowledge utilization is a part of the problem solving process. It involves the systematic gathering of informa-

tion by the school from various internal and external sources, evaluating that information, and making decisions about how to use it. Again, the RDU program focuses on a subset of knowledge utilization activities: the use of externally generated products of educational research and development.

A second common characteristic is that each project includes in its design a number of stages through which each school or school district is expected to go in the process of problem solving and knowledge utilization. Generally, the stages include:

- the identification of a problem or set of problems;
- examination of alternative solutions to the problem (with the focus on externally generated R&D products, such as new materials, concepts, packages or teaching methodologies); and
- the selection,
- implementation, and
- incorporation of a solution.

However, some projects deal with only selected stages of this model, while others have elaborated a number of substages.

Third, the projects all deal directly with the local schools or school districts being served in the program.

Fourth, to coordinate the services provided to the local schools and school districts and to help guide the local school personnel, each project supports two or more "linking agents." The role of the linking agents varies among projects. Most operate out of an intermediate service agency, or a state education agency, and each serves a specific set of local schools or school districts.

Fifth, each project stresses the importance of local decision making relative to the problem solving and knowledge utilization process. The linking agents may supply encouragement, advice on substantive issues and decision making procedures, and access to additional human or financial resources. However, local school personnel must take the initiative in identifying their problem(s) and deciding on a solution. In most projects this is achieved through the establishment of local decision making structures, such as advisory councils or local action teams.

Finally, each project relies to some extent on a network of resource agencies, which cooperate in providing assistance to schools or performing other project tasks. These agencies include state education agencies, intermediate service agencies, public and private universities and colleges, federally funded regional educational laboratories, teacher education centers, and independent research and consulting firms. In some instances, working relationships among these agencies have been developed specifically for an RDU project.

Despite the similarities noted above, there are differences among the projects in the emphasis on different aspects of the RDU program. For those who are interested in the distinguishing features of the individual projects, please see Appendix A.

The RDU Study

Abt Associates' study of the RDU program presents a challenging opportunity to make major contributions to the understanding of rational problem solving in local schools by examining how schools utilize externally developed R&D products to improve administrative procedures and instructional practices. The study also promises to increase the store of relevant information about the design operation and results of dissemination programs in education. It addresses seven major issues:

- how relationships are managed between various agencies which have the expertise and resources to help local schools solve problems;
- to what degree an intervention program such as RDU can help schools overcome barriers to successful problem solving (limited access to information, lack of planning skills, etc.);
- to what degree the products of educational R&D are relevant to the problems and contexts of local schools;
- what the impact is of the products of educational R&D once they have been adopted and implemented;
- what factors contribute to the institutionalization of the RDU approach within a variety of organizations;
- how linking agents coordinate the flow of external resources to schools, and whether this helps the schools solve problems; and

- how efficient the RDU approach is in relation to approaches taken by other major dissemination efforts.

Many specific research questions can be derived from these general issues. To help reduce the complexity of the overall undertaking and to ensure that each issue receives adequate attention, the study has been divided into three distinct but interrelated levels of analysis:

- The School Level Study addresses a set of questions concerning the nature and outcomes of the use of external resources in the problem solving process in schools. It will investigate how this process is related to the school's problems, existing conditions such as the organizational environment and resources, and the services and resources that are delivered to the school during the process.

- The Linking Agent Study offers a framework for understanding the use of linking agents in programs of managed change. It will describe the roles assumed by linking agents at different stages in the problem solving process and when different ranges and types of services and resources are provided to the schools.

- The Project Level Study provides an opportunity to learn about the effectiveness of seven different types of organizational networks (the seven projects), each delivering different types of services and resources to schools with different characteristics and contexts. In addition, the Project Level Study will consider the differences (in structure, objectives, resources, and tactics) between the RDU program and several other federally funded programs for managed educational change.

NIE has identified three priority target groups for the results of the Abt Associates study. These groups are the ones most able to make immediate contributions to the improvement of existing structures and practices for managing change. They are the managers of change programs (including school-based practitioners), policy makers, and researchers. Managers and practitioners need to know what really works if they are to solve educational problems. Policy makers at the state and federal levels require information that will allow them to design programs that will have the highest probability of impact, given limited budgets and other constraints. Researchers, particularly applied researchers, need accurate information about programs and their results in order to develop more refined concepts and models of change which will lead to improved practices in the future.

The Policy Context

Too frequently, evaluations proceed with a limited understanding of the context and information needs of the major users of a study. In order to avoid that mistake, Abt Associates Inc. has begun an ongoing dialogue with policy makers, researchers, and managers of programs of educational change. We have already talked to 25 policy makers in the legislative and executive branches of federal and state government. These informal interviews, lasting approximately one hour each, were conducted during April, May, and June of 1978.

The objectives of these interviews were:

- to ascertain the policy relevance and context of the RDU study;
- to make sure that the issues and questions on which this study has been focused are appropriate;
- to identify additional questions that could be answered through this study; and
- to determine the policy makers' priorities among the issues and questions that the study will address.

Staff members of NIE's Program on Dissemination and Improvement of Practice assisted us in the selection of potential interviewees. In particular, we sought individuals who had experience in, or were familiar with, policy decisions relating to educational problem solving and the use and dissemination of educational knowledge. We hoped that these individuals would be broadly representative of four different groups of policy makers: federal-executive, federal-legislative, state-executive, and state-legislative.

The 25 policy makers who ultimately were interviewed included 12 at the federal level and 13 at the state level, with about twice as many executive as legislative representatives at each level. The full list of interviewees is presented on the inside back cover of this booklet.

During the interviews, the policy makers were asked to address themselves to three topics:

- the importance of the RDU program and the RDU study;
- the relevance of the study issues to educational decision making; and

- the usefulness of the levels of analysis and the research questions.

Importance of the RDU Program and the Abt Associates Study

The policy makers strongly endorsed both the program and the study. First of all, they recognized the need for a systematic effort to put the latest educational tools in the hands of the classroom teachers instead of on some shelf. The policy makers also agreed that the RDU program was right to let local schools define their own problems in basic skills and career education; they felt that local principals and teachers are in the best positions to identify where they are, where they want to go, and how they can get there. The information on available products and services, the financial resources, and the linking agents provided by the program help the schools along rather than directing them.

State policy makers commonly expressed appreciation of the federal government's initiatives in the field of dissemination, approving of the RDU program as well as earlier activities. In particular, they welcomed the additional resources that federal efforts provide. However, they also acknowledged that the federal government is uniquely able (1) to organize a national experiment with different approaches to knowledge utilization and problem solving and (2) to compile data bases of available R&D products that individual states could not hope to duplicate on their own.

Secondly, the policy makers felt that a study of how the RDU program worked and what it accomplished was a worthwhile project with many potential informational payoffs. Information on the process and outcomes of educational change was sought by some policy makers, who mentioned that they could take advantage of this information by making sure that future programs incorporate any contextual factors which the study found promoted desirable change and avoid any which hindered it. Interviewees also thought that the study could contribute to their understanding of how schools solve problems, how well external linkage arrangements work, and what value the products being disseminated have. Finally, the possibility that the study might produce evaluative data on the RDU program's cost-effectiveness and impact on schools was often mentioned as a major reason why this study should be conducted.

One policy maker did question the timing of the RDU program and, by extension, any attempt to study it. This congressional staff member

argued that it is premature to operate a dissemination program for products of unproven effectiveness. It would be preferable, he suggested, for Abt Associates to study and verify the products' worth before NIE spends any more time or money to disseminate them.

Even policy makers who were supportive of the RDU program and study advised Abt Associates to make sure that the study was relevant to the needs of practitioners and not just other researchers. Some said they were tired of research reports that arrived too late or were too full of theoretical speculations to help them make the tough decisions. Several policy makers accented the need for study reports to avoid using terms unfamiliar to those not currently involved in the practice of educational dissemination. It was clear from our interviews that the study's usefulness would depend in large measure on the extent to which it produced timely, practical information that could be understood by a wide range of people in the educational community.

Relevance of the Study Issues to Educational Decision-Making

The policy makers were asked how much they would value information about each of the seven major issues guiding the study. Our concern was that the study should produce reliable data which educational leaders could readily apply to decision making. Figure 2 reveals not only the rankings assigned to the issues by the interviewees but also some striking differences of opinion between the federal and state policy makers.

Information about how much impact R&D products had on schools (Issue # 4) was given a high priority by almost everyone. Many argued that this issue was the "bottom line" of the entire study since other issues were mainly concerned with factors facilitating impact or explaining how it occurs. One respondent commented that unless the RDU program helped schools teach kids in the areas of basic skills and career education, the rest of the program was intellectually stimulating but practically worthless. Since the policy makers valued information on this issue, they also cautioned Abt Associates to be careful not to attribute impacts to the RDU program in situations where other programs or circumstances might have produced the apparent change.

There was less agreement among the policy makers concerning the other issues. Predictably, federal-level interviewees were substantially more interested in comparing the RDU program with other federal dissemination efforts than were those on the state level (Issue # 7). On the other hand, many states are currently experimenting with linkage arrangements — more to strengthen administrative relationships between

Figure 2

RANKINGS OF STUDY ISSUES BY FEDERAL AND STATE POLICY MAKERS

		Rankings by Federal Policy Makers	Rankings by State Policy Makers
1.	How relations are managed between various agencies which have the expertise and resources to assist local schools in problem solving	5	3
2.	To what degree an intervention program such as RDU can help schools overcome barriers to successful problem solving (limited access to information, lack of planning skills, etc.)	3	5
3.	To what degree the products of educational R&D are relevant to the problems and contexts of local schools	7	4
4.	What the impact is of the products of educational R&D once they have been adopted and implemented	1	2
5.	What factors contribute to the institutionalization of the RDU approach within a variety of organizations	4	6
6.	How linking agents coordinate the flow of external resources to schools, and whether this helps the schools solve problems	6	1
7.	How efficient the RDU approach is in relation to approaches taken by other major dissemination efforts	2	7

NOTE: The issue assigned the highest priority is ranked # 1, the second highest # 2, and so on.

the state department and local districts than to disseminate knowledge — and these policy makers were eager for information about how linking agents work (Issue # 6). The state-level emphasis on reinforcing state-local ties might also account for their fairly high ranking of the issues on the management of interorganizational relationships (Issue # 1).

When asked for specific examples of how they would use information about various issues, the federal policy makers mentioned several pending decisions which could be influenced by a study of the RDU program:

- expansion of current knowledge dissemination and utilization activities;
- reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act;
- reauthorization of the National Institute of Education, especially consideration of its appropriate role in knowledge dissemination;
- annual appropriations for NIE in particular and HEW in general; and
- applicability of an agricultural "extension agent" model to education; a national communication network could be established to inform educational practitioners about innovative educational products.

The state-level policy makers observed that decisions relating to some states' plans for decentralizing educational authority could well be influenced by RDU program information. The study might help state agencies develop mechanisms for linking them with what the schools are doing. Other possible uses of study data in state-level decision making included the development of statewide compilations of available educational products, strengthening of school linkages with universities, and state technical assistance in local problem solving.

The policy makers also were asked to react to lists of potential research questions that had been generated for each of the three levels of analysis in the Abt Associates study (school, linking agent, and project). For those interested in the policy makers' perceptions of the most important levels of analysis and research questions, please see Appendix B.

Plans for the Study

Abt Associates' design for the RDU study envisions the use of a variety of data collection strategies. Over the next two years, these strategies will include site visits to, telephone and in-person interviews with, and mail surveys of:

- central RDU project staff;
- teachers and administrators;
- linking agents;
- NIE officials; and
- representatives of other federal programs for dissemination and local program improvement.

In addition, project documents such as activity logs, budget and evaluation reports, and organization charts will be used to address many of the research questions. Finally, a great quantity of anecdotal and descriptive data, plus site-specific analyses, will be available from case studies being produced by researchers who have been employed for this purpose by each of the individual projects. About six to eight case studies are being written for each project, following common formats and outlines prepared especially to ensure the relevance of the case studies to the overall RDU study.

Integrating and analyzing the vast amounts of quantitative and qualitative data being generated for this study will be a challenging undertaking. This task will be made simpler by focusing on the three different levels of analysis. Although the conceptual models and variables for these levels of analysis are compatible, they also can be viewed independently, thus simplifying not only the analysis but also the reporting.

At least three types of reports will be produced:

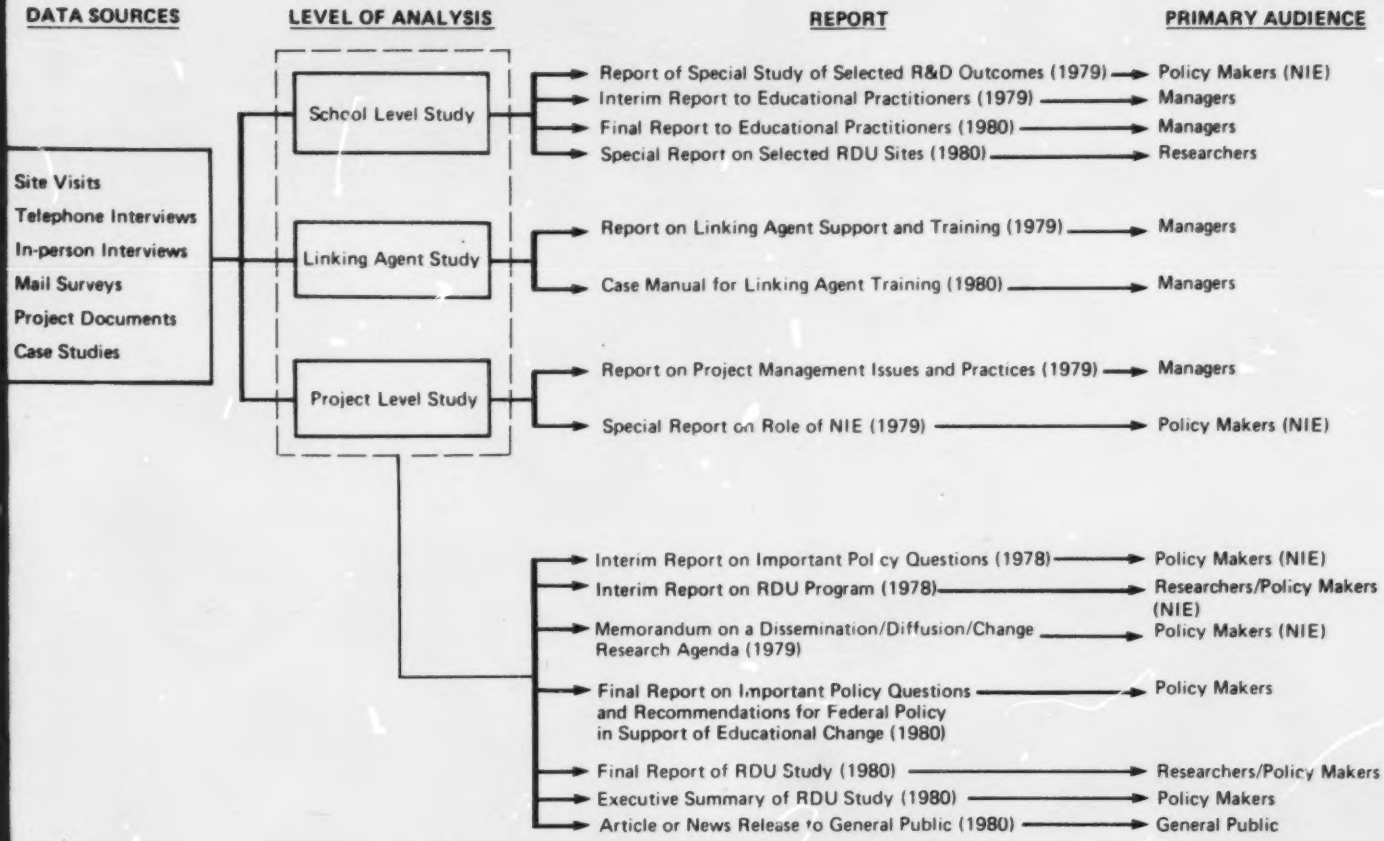
- summary reports, which highlight the issues and options concerned with a particular program topic;
- issue-oriented reports, which provide somewhat more depth on a given topic than would a summary report and are aimed at explaining RDU tactics and procedures; and

- **technical reports**, which contain detailed data findings and justification of analyses to support the description and conclusions contained in the other two types of reports.

While the final results of the study will not be available until the fall of 1980, preliminary reports will be produced beginning in the fall of 1978 as indicated in Figure 3.

Questions about the RDU study should be directed to Karen Seashore Louis or Michael B. Kane at Abt Associates Inc. (617/492-7100). Further information about the RDU program is available from Thomas Israel of NIE's Program on Dissemination and Improvement of Practice (202/254-5510).

Figure 3
THE RELATIONSHIP OF DATA SOURCES, LEVELS OF ANALYSIS, REPORTS, AND AUDIENCES IN THE STUDY OF THE R&D UTILIZATION PROGRAM


DATA SOURCES
LEVEL OF ANALYSIS
REPORT
PRIMARY AUDIENCE
Site Visits
Telephone Interviews
In-person Interviews
Mail Surveys
Project Documents
Case Studies
School Level Study
Linking Agent Study
Project Level Study
Report of Special Study of Selected R&D Outcomes (1979)
Policy Makers (NIE)
Interim Report to Educational Practitioners (1979)
Managers
Final Report to Educational Practitioners (1980)
Managers
Special Report on Selected RDU Sites (1980)
Researchers
Report on Linking Agent Support and Training (1979)
Managers
Case Manual for Linking Agent Training (1980)
Managers
Report on Project Management Issues and Practices (1979)
Managers
Special Report on Role of NIE (1979)
Policy Makers (NIE)
Interim Report on Important Pol cy Questions (1978)
Policy Makers (NIE)
Interim Report on RDU Program (1978)
Researchers/Policy Makers (NIE)
Memorandum on a Dissemination/Diffusion/Change Research Agenda (1979)
Policy Makers (NIE)
Final Report on Important Policy Questions and Recommendations for Federal Policy in Support of Educational Change (1980)
Policy Makers
Final Report of RDU Study (1980)
Researchers/Policy Makers
Executive Summary of RDU Study (1980)
Policy Makers
Article or News Release to General Public (1980)
General Public

Appendix A

RDU Project Descriptions

Pennsylvania Department of Education. The participating agencies of the Pennsylvania RDU project, in addition to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, are Research for Better Schools (a regional educational laboratory), Research and Information Services for Education (an independent information and dissemination service), the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh, and two of the state's intermediate service agencies. Two full-time linking agents — one in each intermediate service agency, each working with five schools — serve as the primary project contacts for their respective schools and coordinate all project services to those schools. In addition, they frequently visit the schools to carry out needs assessment activities and to assist in group planning and decision making sessions. The project's problem solving model, which was developed by the participating resource agencies, involves numerous defined steps, including a series of formal sessions at the school sites. These sessions are attended not only by the local action team and the linking agent, but also by a team of resource agency personnel.

Georgia Department of Education. The emphasis of the RDU project in Georgia is on building local educational agency (school district) capacities in the early stages of planning and program selection. To achieve this purpose, services and funds are being provided to 38 participating school districts to assist them through these early stages. The implementation phase of the problem solving model is subsequently carried out with federal funds available through the state Department of Education under Title IV-C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The school districts participating in the project are located in 3 of the state's 16 intermediate service agencies. Each of the participating service agencies employs from one to four linking agents — most of whom serve part-time in this role — to assist the local school personnel in carrying out their planning and program selection activities. The extent of involvement of these linking agents in the local site activities varies considerably: some offer extensive personal assistance and consultation, others simply monitor and provide liaison to project staff at the state level.

Florida Department of Education. Under this project, the Florida Department of Education is developing a linkage system involving the Department, several universities in the state (including Florida State University and the University of Florida), eight of the state's Teacher Education Centers (TEC's), approximately 30 schools in the eight TEC

areas, and various other agencies. A distinctive feature of this project is that training in group problem solving techniques is provided not only to the linking agents (one of whom is located in each TEC) but also to selected local school staff, called "school site facilitators." The school site facilitators, with the help of their respective linking agents, are responsible for leading the staff at their sites through the entire problem solving and knowledge utilization process. The TEC linking agents play an important monitoring and facilitating role. Their involvement with the project ranges from half- to full-time. Each school is also assigned a university-based linker, who plays a less active, consultative role.

Michigan Department of Education. The RDU project in Michigan is designed to help local sites meet the requirements of state career education legislation passed in 1974. One of the project's major objectives is to develop a permanent dissemination and diffusion system in career education. Because of this emphasis on building a permanent system, the project is attempting to work with existing structures, rather than building new ones. Part of this strategy is to use as linking agents the 49 Career Education Planning District (CEPD) coordinators located within the state's participating intermediate service agencies. The CEPD coordinators are responsible for monitoring, assisting and documenting project-related activities at the site level. However, this project differs from most of the RDU projects in that it places less emphasis on the linking agent role; in fact, the project provides no salary support for the CEPD coordinators. The primary strategy is to provide direct training and programmatic funds to coordinators who are staff members at the local sites, thus building the sites' internal capacity for pursuing a problem solving sequence and implementing innovative programs in career education. Forty-nine school or school district sites (one each in all but 5 of the state's 54 intermediate service districts) are assisted through this project.

National Education Association. The National Education Association (NEA) operates this project in collaboration with the state education agencies and corresponding state education associations in 12 states: Alabama, California, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. In contrast to most of the other RDU projects, this project focuses on teacher inservice education problems. Local inservice education committees in approximately 60 school districts decide on local needs for teacher inservice education and communicate these needs (via a toll-free telephone call) to one of two information specialists in NEA's Washington, D.C. office. Making use of an information system containing descriptions of hundreds of inservice training programs, the information specialists then select those inservice education packages that seem

most appropriate and send descriptions of these packages to the site. On-site support for needs assessment and problem identification is provided by two linking agents in each state, who also train the local staff in how to utilize the information system. One of these linking agents ("state facilitators") is a staff member of the state education agency, and the other is on the staff of the state education association. Each commits about 10-15% of his or her time to the RDU project.

The NETWORK. Under the overall management of The NETWORK, a nonprofit research and service organization in Andover, Massachusetts, a consortium of agencies in six states has been formed to improve the utilization of R&D products in reading in selected local schools. The six-state consortium is designed so that the member agencies reflect a variety of organizational types. In Minnesota, the agency involved is a teacher center associated with a university; in Washington, a local school district; in California, a regional educational laboratory sponsored by NIE; in Kansas, an independent statewide educational diffusion organization; in Connecticut, a cooperative service agency supported by local school districts; and in Massachusetts, a division of The NETWORK itself. Approximately 25 school sites are served by the project's linking agents, one of whom is located in each of the six member agencies of the consortium. The project relies very heavily on these linking agents, who are committed to the project approximately full time. Particular importance is given to their role as managers of the change process who coordinate both the internal and the external resources necessary for problem solving and R&D product utilization. A considerable amount of direct technical assistance and support is provided to the linking agents by the central project office.

Northwest Reading Consortium. This project, under the overall direction of the Washington state education agency, is operated as a consortium of four states in the Northwest: Washington, Oregon, Alaska, and Idaho. The project builds upon the existing Right to Read (R2R) programs in the four states. (Right to Read is a nationwide program sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education to eliminate functional illiteracy.) Each of the approximately 40 participating schools is an R2R school. Considered an extension of the R2R experience, the project is providing the schools with the knowledge and resources to seek R&D based solutions to problems identified through comprehensive needs assessments. The field work with the local schools is done by a full-time linking agent housed at each of four linking agencies: these include intermediate service districts in Washington, Oregon and Alaska, and a university in Idaho. An additional affiliate of the Consortium, the Northwest Regional Laboratory, is responsible for training the linking agents and also compiling the "knowledge base" of available R&D products to which the schools can refer.

Appendix B

Usefulness of the Levels of Analysis and Research Questions

Even large scale social research like the RDU program study needs to set priorities among the many phenomena it might investigate. For each of the levels of analysis (school, linking agent, and project), Abt Associates generated lists of potential research questions which a study of the RDU program might address. To assist us in focusing on the most important questions, the policy makers were asked to identify the three or four at each level of analysis which seemed most relevant to their planning and decision making agenda.

The policy makers were most interested in the results of the School Level Study because they felt that the RDU program would succeed or fail in the schools. The questions which were viewed as most pertinent to the policy makers' educational and administrative concerns were:

- What pre-existing conditions in schools and school districts are associated with success or failure of various RDU activities?
- What combinations of internal-external resources and tactics are related to various measures of success?
- What types of information are considered most useful to problem solving groups during various activities in the RDU process?

Four questions in the Linking Agent Study were given a high priority by the policy makers:

- What characteristics of the linking agents' organizational setting aid or impede their role performance?
- How does the involvement of linking agents affect the school's effectiveness and responsiveness to social change?
- What types of training programs, orientation materials, organizational settings, and other support mechanisms should be developed and provided for linking agents?
- What do linking agents do? How is the linking agent role defined? How does this role compare with other similar roles such as change agent or consultant?

Of the questions in the Project Level Study, policy makers were most interested in the following:

- What are the consequences of differences in procedures, status, structure, or goals for cooperation between organizations involved in RDU programs? How do RDU project directors deal with differences between organizations within their network?

- What specialized functions can best be performed by what types of organizations at various stages in the problem solving process?

- What types of interorganizational relationships are most likely to be institutionalized? What actions can be taken to ease this process?

- What are the costs of developing and sustaining interorganizational relationships of the type utilized in the RDU projects?

- How do projects sponsored by the RDU, National Diffusion Network, State Capacity Building Grants, and Demonstration and Technical Assistance programs differ in their structure, specific objectives, types of resources they draw upon in the change effort, and the specific tactics brought to bear on client problem solving? To what extent can varying outcomes of these projects be attributed to the interprogram differences?

A Study of the R&D Utilization Program
POLICY MAKER INTERVIEWEES

April - June, 1978

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